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Relationship Between Self-Concept, Family Relationship and Externalizing Behavior Among Adolescents in Selangor

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between self-concept, family relationship quality and externalizing behavior problem (aggressive behavior and delinquency behavior) among adolescents in Selangor. Besides that, this study also to determine the level of self-concept, family relationship quality and externalizing behavior among secondary school students as well as to compare the differences between these three variables according to sex. A total of 400 students ($n_{\text{male}}=53\%$, $n_{\text{female}}=47\%$) from secondary schools were selected in this study. The multi-stage cluster sampling technique was used during sample selection. Data were obtained from self-administered questionnaire that are consist of Individual Protective Factors Index Questionnaire (1992), Family Relationship Characteristics (1997), Aggression Scale (2001) and Problem Behavior Frequency Scale (1977). The findings revealed that majority of students have moderate level of self-concept, family relationship quality as well as externalizing behavior. In terms of sex differences, the results showed that family belief, family structure and externalizing behavior have significant differences according to sex ($t=-4.393$ to 7.588 , $p<0.01$). Moreover, result indicated that there were negative significant relationship between self-concept, family cohesion and family structure with aggressive behavior ($r=-0.210$ to -0.153 , $p<0.01$). Moreover, the result showed the negative significant relationship between family structure and delinquency behavior ($r=-0.104$, $p<0.05$). These results suggest that self concept and family relationship quality are an importance factors for the development of adolescents behaviors.

Keywords: adolescents, self-concept, family relationship, externalizing behavior

Introduction

For years ago, externalizing behavior is one of the issues that have gotten a lot of attention from various party such as academician, politician, government and even society either in Malaysia or in other countries. Externalizing behaviors is a heterogeneous concept encompassing physical aggression, verbal bullying, relational aggression, defiance, theft and vandalism. The externalizing behavior problems refer to a grouping of behavior problems that are manifested in children's outward behavior and reflect the child negatively acting on the external environment (Campbell, Shaw, & Gilliom, 2000; Eisenberg et al., 2001). Some studies were referred externalizing behavior as one of mental health problem or oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). For example, according to American Psychiatric Association (APA, 1994), the externalization construct also include the oppositional defiant disorder, which involves oppositional behavior (negative, hostile, and defiant behavior) especially shown by

young children to their parents and teachers. Then, once again APA (2013), mentioned that children with ODD annoy other people, refuse to comply with requests or rules of adults, blame others for their own mistakes, are easily irritated and often angry. This shows that there are various concepts that were used by various scholars all around the world, but the things is this is the similar behavior problems that spread fastly in our nation.

Most countries were facing similar problems years by years. For example, in Netherlands, 13.6% of the children between 4 to 11 years old have externalizing behavior problems (De Looze et al., 2014). Also, in Malaysia, the externalizing behavior start as early as 12 years old until late of adolescents at age 18 years old. Generally, the prevalence of offending tends to increase from late childhood, peak in the teenage years (from 15 to 19) and then decline in the early 20s. According to Royal Malaysian Police (RMP), the juvenile delinquency involving children and adolescents increases drastically from 3,700 cases in 2012 to 7, 816 cases in year 2013 (Shuhada, 2015). Although, between 2014 and 2015 the number of juvenile offenders were declined 10.3% from 5,096 cases (2014) to 4,569 cases (2015). However, the repeated offence was recorded an increase of 12.4% from 371 cases (2014) to 417 cases (2015) (Children Statistics, Malaysia, 2016).

Previous scholar have proved that there is an important of family relationship quality and self concept in the development of externalizing behavior among adolescents. Family especially parent is a role model of children in the developing of behavior since the behavior are learnt in early childhood via socializing and observation process. Children who show early externalizing behaviors such as non-compliance and disruptive behaviors are likely to develop conflict-laden relationships with their parents (Campbell et al., 2010; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). Family is important in order to teach the children to control unacceptable behavior, to delay gratification, and to respect the rights of others. In mostly cases, children could learned through the observation of their parents displayed behavior either in positive or negative ways including aggressive behavior. Fearon et al. (2010) and Hoeve et al. (2012) have shown that adolescents' attachment to their parents is associated with concurrent and later aggression and delinquency. Deater-Deckard et al. (2009) found "household" chaos, as indicated by excessive household noise and lack of family routines, was associated with child conduct problems, both concurrently and longitudinally.

In addition, self-concept also becoming the dominant concerned in social psychology. Self-concept is viewed as an individual's cognitive image of oneself. It is a multifaceted structure, which includes a descriptive definition of the self as well as the ideas, feelings, thoughts, images and attitudes regarding the self and the individual's abilities in certain domains (e.g. academic performance, social competency) (Houck et al., 2010). Self-concept are important in order to help children to understand their social environment and guide their future behaviors. In other words, children whose come to know and understand themselves acquire an important guide for their behavior and social relationships (Hay, 2005). Findings indicated that self-concept predicts the externalizing behavior problems. According to Marsh et al. (2004), self-concept is regarded as an important risk factor influencing social functioning and problem behaviors in adolescence, thereby contributing to mental health difficulties. Johnston and Krettenauer (2011) found that moral self could predict anti-social behavior. Besides that, numerous past studies were found out the significant difference between age and behavior problems. For example, it have been consistently reported in the previous literature that showed the significant differences in antisocial behavior based on sex, with boys having higher prevalence rates or symptom levels than girls, (Lahey et al., 2000; Maughan et al., 2004; Odgers et al., 2008).

In addition, these aggressive and non-aggressive (i.e., rule-breaking) behaviors have also been shown to be more useful in predicting antisocial outcomes later in life than the age-of-onset classification (Burt, Donnellan, Iacono, & McGue, 2011). While there have been studies that address social problems among the adolescents, comparative analysis of adolescents involvement in negative activities while considering adolescent's self-concept as a factors towards externalizing problems is still lacking. Thus, this study was designed to determine the relationship between self-concept, family relationship and externalizing behavior problems (aggressive behavior and delinquency behavior) among adolescents in Selangor. Besides that, the study also addressed others research questions which are: a) what is the level of respondent's self-concept, family relationship and externalizing behavior (aggressive behavior

and delinquency behavior)? and b) are there any significant differences in self-concept, family relationship and externalizing behavior (aggressive behavior and delinquency behavior) according to sex?.

Methodology

The present study was utilized a cross-sectional research design by using descriptive and correlational method. The study involved 400 secondary school students (53% boys, 47% girls) from eight selected secondary school in state of Selangor. The state of Selangor was chosen because of high intensity of population of secondary school students in Selangor. Furthermore, in 2014, Selangor is seeing 10% jump in teenage crime compare the corresponding period in 2013. According to State police chief Senior Deputy Comm Datuk Shukri Dahlan, about 165 teenagers from age 12 to 17 years old has been arrested for violent crimes including crimes related blackmail, snatch thefts, being a part of gangs and drugs syndicates between January and March 2014. Also, for minor offences such as motorcycle thefts the statistics accounted 40% of the crimes (Nicholas, 2014). An inclusion criteria was determine by the researcher to ensure that, the sample selected will be representative to the studied population The inclusion criteria include secondary school students in Selangor aged between 13 to 18 years old who involved in disciplinary problems in school. In addition, those who were unable to understand Malay language were excluded from this study.

The sample was selected by using multi-stage cluster sampling technique. At first stage, the selection of districts in Selangor. There were totalled nine districts in Selangor but only four districts was selected randomly which were Gombak, Petaling, Kuala Langat and Klang. Next, the selection of schools was made randomly from the list of Selangor secondary schools (Education Department of Selangor, 2017). Lastly, respondents who have disciplinary record was selected to participate in this study.

This study was using survey method and questionnaires was used as an instrument to gather the information. Students were asked to respond to each item independently and answered the all questions honestly. The instruments consist of four part of questionnaire which are personal characteristics of respondents, self-concept, family relationship and externalizing behavior (aggressive behavior and delinquency behavior).

Socio demographic profile: This section gathered basic personal information of the respondents such as age and sex.

Independent variable: Self-Concept—Individual Protective Factors Index Questionnaire (Phillips & Springer, 1992) was used to measure the self-concept. The scale composed of 16 items (eg. I like the way I act). The items were measured by 4-point likert scale (1=very false, 2=somewhat false, 3=somewhat true, 4=very true) with the maximum scores indicates strong self-concept whereas the minimum score indicates as weak-self-concept. The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale as 0.73 for the present study.

Family Relationship characteristics scale (Tolan, Gorman-Smith, Huesmann & Zelli, 1997). There were 32 items that was analyzed which consist of three subscales: family cohesion, beliefs about family and family structure. This is a four likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The scores were; 1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree and 4=strongly agree (e.g. Kids should value a close relationship with their family and not have to be asked to spend time at home (belief about family), I am able to let others in the family know how I really feel (Cohesion) and The children make the decisions in our family (family structure). The present study found the internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.79.

Dependent variables: The dimensions of externalizing behaviors were accessed separately through two subscales that are: a) Aggression Scale (Orpinas & Frankowski, 2001), and b) Problem Behavior Frequency Scale (Jessor & Jessor, 1977). The aggression scale composed 11 items (e.g. I teased

students to make them angry) with about how many times during the last month they had committed any of that behavior. The response alternatives for all of these items ranging from never to more than 6 times (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6+). The delinquency behavior was measured by Problem behavior frequency scale which composed of 8 items with 5-point likert scale and the score assigned as following: Never = 1; 1-2 times = 2; 3-5 times = 3; 6-9 times = 4; 10-19 times = 5; and 20 or more times = 6. High scores on the scale imply a high frequency of offending. Each variables of self-concept and externalizing behavior was divided into three categories which were low level, moderate level and high level. The higher number of times respondent's commit on that items, the higher externalizing behavior among the respondents. The internal consistency reliability coefficient for both aggressive behavior and delinquency behavior were 0.78 and 0.81 respectively.

Results and Discussions

The distribution of respondents demographic background

A total of 400 students who take part in the study were classified into two categories which are lower secondary students and upper secondary students. As illustrated in Table 1, the finding was reported that out of 400 students who were selected, 228(57%) of respondents were lower secondary student which aged are 15 years old and below and the balance of 172(43%) were from upper secondary students aged from 16 years old and above. Meanwhile, in term of sex, majority 212 (53%) of respondents were boy and 188 (47%) were girls. Next, majority 312(78%) of respondents were Malay, followed by 54(13.5%) Chinese, and 30(7.0%) Indian and the rest 4(1.5%) are others category. In term of parental income, majority respondents were in category of RM1000-2000 which are 108(27.0%), followed by 67(16.8%) whose parental income between RM 2001 to 3000. Next, three quarters of the respondents have parents who are married 345(86.3%) and lived with them 335(83.8%).

Table 1: Respondent's distribution of demographic background (N=400)

Variables	n	(%)
Age		
Lower secondary student (aged ≤ 15 years old)	228	57.0
Upper secondary student (aged ≥ 16 years old)	172	43.0
mean	15.10	
Sd.	1.633	
Min.	13	
Max.	18	
Sex		
Boy	212	53.0
Girl	188	47.0
Race		
Malay	312	78.0
Chinese	54	13.5
Indian	30	7.0
Others	4	1.5
Parental income		
<1000	27	6.8
1000-2000	108	27.0
2001-3000	67	16.8
3001-4000	26	6.5

4001-5000	29	7.3
5001-6000	10	2.5
6001-7000	12	3.0
>7000	53	13.3
Missing	68	17.0
Mean	3611.55	
Sd.	2453.54	
Max.	9000	
Min.	500	
Marital parental status		
Married	345	86.3
Divorce	29	7.3
Widow	22	5.5
Others	4	1.0
Guardian		
Parents	335	83.8
Father Only	10	2.5
Mother Only	45	11.2
Grandparents and Others	10	2.5

Levels of variables

Table 2 shows that majority (74.0%) of respondents were in moderate level of self-concept with mean value are 34.57 (S.D.=4.77), while 18.5% were in low level of self-concept followed by 7.5% who have higher level of self-concept. The finding stated that majority of respondents 260 (65.0%) were in moderate level of family cohesion with mean score of 2.03(S.D.=0.59). Meanwhile, analysis also revealed that, the 76 (19.0%) of respondents shows high level of family cohesion, followed by 64(16.0%) of respondents who show low level of family cohesion. Next, it was also reported that the majority of the respondents were scored moderately in family belief 295(73.8%) followed by 54 (13.5%) whose scored low in family belief and 51(12.8%) scored high level of family belief. As for the family structure, majority 263 (65.8%) of respondents also shows moderate level of family structure. About 80(20.0%) of them have high level of family structure and only 57(14.3%) shows that they were in low level of family structure.

Table 2: Levels of self-concept, family relationship quality and externalizing behavior (N=400)

Variables	n	%	Mean	S.D.	Max.	Min.
Self-concept						
Low (23-29)	74	18.5	34.57	4.77	47.00	23.00
Moderate (30-39)	296	74.0				
High (40-47)	30	7.5				
Family Relationship Quality						
<i>Family cohesion</i>						
Low (1.82-2.58)	64	16.0	3.01	0.44	4.00	1.82

Moderate (2.59-3.45)	260	65.0				
High (3.46-4.00)	76	19.0				
Family belief						
Low (2.40-3.00)	54	13.5	3.36	0.35	4.00	2.40
Moderate (3.01-3.71)	295	73.8				
High (3.72-4.00)	51	12.8				
Family structure						
Low (2.00-2.44)	57	14.3	2.71	0.27	3.45	2.00
Moderate (2.45-2.99)	263	65.8				
High (3.00-3.45)	80	20.0				
Externalizing Behavior						
Aggressive Behavior						
Low (0-8)	74	18.50	17.27	9.64	40.00	0.00
Moderate (9-27)	264	66.00				
High (28-40)	63	15.50				
Delinquency Behavior						
Low (8-9)	44	11.00	12.02	3.53	21.00	8.00
Moderate (10-16)	302	75.50				
High (17-21)	54	13.50				

Note: S.D.= standard deviation, Min =Minimum, Max= Maximum

In the same table, majority (66%) of respondents showed the moderate level of aggressive behavior with mean 17.27 (S.D.=9.64). The percentage that shows low level of aggressive were 18.50% whereas, 15.50% of them were in high level of aggressive behavior. Last but not least, delinquency behavior also reported to have similar results with other variables which was majority of respondents (302%) were in moderate level with mean 12.02(S.D.=3.53) of delinquency whereby, about 13.50% respondents have high level of delinquency behavior followed by 11.00% respondents which show low level of delinquency behavior. Thus, it could be concluded that majority of respondents were in moderate level of self-concept, family relationship quality, deviant peer socialization, aggressive behavior and delinquency behavior.

The differences in self-concept, family relationship quality and externalizing behavior based on sex

T-test was used to analyse the differences in self-concept and externalizing behavior (aggressive behavior and delinquency behavior) according to sex. Table 3 denoted that there was no significant difference in self-concept between boys and girls ($t= 0.614$, $p>0.05$). It meant that the boys and girls have similarity in self-concept. This finding was parallel with the previous research that were conducted by Arun, Ravikumar, Makhija, Barreto, Vishwanathan (2015), found that male and female adolescents has no difference on self-concept.

Next, the study denoted that there was significant different in two dimension of family relationship between boy and girl respondents which are family belief ($t= -4.393$, $p<0.001$) and family structure ($t= -3.047$, $p<0.001$). The findings proved that the family belief and family structure have significant differences according to sex. Even though the family have repeatedly been identified as an important factor in the understanding of offending among both boys and girls (e.g., Hoeve et al. 2009; Junger-Taseta, 2004; Kruttschnitt & Giordano, 2009), the studies focused have produced inconsistent findings regarding sex differences in the relationship between family and adolescent offending. It is unclear

whether the same family variables can explain whether family influences have a significant differences between boys and girls (Hoeve et al. 2009, 2012; Wong et al. 2010).

Table 3 also reported the t-test analysis of externalizing behavior based on sex. The results indicated that there is a significant difference in aggressive behavior according to sex ($t= 3.798$, $p<0.001$). Based on the result, boys reported have been involved in aggressive more than girls. Thus, the finding was parallel with the previous study which mentioned that aggression is found to be more common in boys than in girls. Boys often engage in physical aggression, girls are more likely to exhibit what has been termed relational aggression, such as exclusion of others from their social group, and slander (Hadley, 2003). Similarly, finding shows that there was a significant difference in delinquency behavior based on sex ($t=7.588$, $p<0.001$). Also, the current findings that the externalizing behavior differed between girls and boys. The results found that boys have higher externalizing behavior than girls. Multiple past study have showed the consistent results with current findings in which the sex have significant differences in antisocial behavior, with boys having higher prevalence rates than girls (Lahey, et al., 2000, Maughan, et al., 2004 and Odgers et al., 2008). It has also been suggested that sex differences in a range of unhealthy adolescent behaviors, including the fact that boys present higher levels of aggressive behavior and violence than girls (Loeber, et al., 2013; Weerman, et al., 2015), arise because of differences between boys and girls in parental attachments (Mandara et al. 2012). According to Nilsson (2016), there are significant differences between boys and girls in the associations between the dimensions of attachment and family interaction and offending in which boys involvement in crime was higher than girls.

Table 3: T-test on self-concept, family relationship quality and externalizing behavior among adolescents according to sex (N=400)

Variable	Mean	S.D.	t	p
Self-concept				
Male	45.731	6.144	0.614	0.540
Female	45.356	6.044		
Family cohesion				
Male	2.982	.459	1.560	0.120
Female	3.051	.416		
Family belief				
Male	3.285	.375	-4.393	0.000***
Female	3.436	.311		
Family structure				
Male	2.675	.269	-3.047	0.002**
Female	2.757	.271		
Aggressive behavior				
Male	18.962	9.862	3.798	0.000***
Female	15.356	9.023		
Delinquency behavior				
Male	13.179	3.909	7.588	0.000***
Female	10.723	2.477		

Note: S.D.= Standard deviation, t= t-value, p=significant (2 tailed)

p< 0.01, *p< 0.001

Relationship between self-concept, family relationship quality and externalizing behavior

Table 4 show the pearson correlation analyses which were measured the relationship between self-concept, family relationship and externalizing behavior. Finding was indicated that there was negative significant relationship between self-concept and aggressive behavior ($r=-0.161$, $p<0.001$). The findings implied that the stronger self-concept within the respondents, the lower of aggressive behavior. In contrast, the result revealed that self-concept was not significantly correlate with delinquency behavior ($r=-0.003$, $p>0.951$). A number of empirical studies have linked a negative self-concept with aggressive behavior (Marsh, Parada, Yeung, & Healey, 2001; Moretti, Holland, & McKay, 2001), rule-breaking and delinquent behavior (Donellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005; Hay, 2000). Ybrandt (2008), found that the negative self-concept have the direct and indirect effects on problem behaviors. Overall, the self-concept was a broad view on perceptions of self and it could brought up different effect according to dimation that was study on. The self-concept is regarded as both risk factor influencing social functioning and problem behaviors in adolescence contributing to different kind of mental health problems (Marsh, Parada, & Ayotte, 2004) and protective factor that impede psychological problems and promotes general well-being (Gilman & Huebner, 2006; McCullough, Huebner, & Laughlin, 2000; Steinhausen & Metzke, 2001).

The results show that family cohesion have negative significant correlation with the aggressive behavior ($r=-0.153$, $p<0.01$). Similarly, family structure was showed the negative significant relationship with the aggressive behavior ($r=-0.210$, $p<0.01$). Moreover, family structure was found to have negative significant relationship with delinquency behavior ($r=-0.104$, $p=0.038$). As suggested from previous studies, family structure, family support, and family functioning are factors that are related at the family level (Wong, Slotboom, and Bijleveld 2010; Hoeve et al. 2012). Dishion & Pattern (2006) stated that negative interactions between mothers and children were related to externalizing behavior problems. Besides that, Hoeve et al. (2012) found that adolescents which having a close relationship with their parents will care about parents' expectation more on adherence to conventional rules, which prevents adolescents from delinquent involvement.

Table 4: Pearson correlation test on self-concept, family relationship quality and externalizing behavior

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Self-concept	-					
	-					
2.Family cohesion	.370**	-				
	.000	-				
3.Family belief	.266**	.528**	-			
	.000	.000	-			
4.Family structure	.298**	.302**	.269**	-		
	.000	.000	.000	-		
5.Aggressive behavior	-.161**	-.153**	-.058	-.210**	-	
	.001	.002	.246	.000	-	
6.Delinquency behavior	-.003	-.045	-.012	-.104*	.369**	-
	.951	.373	.812	.038	.000	-

Note: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the study show that the externalizing behavior problems among adolescents were in moderate level. Although the adolescents engagement in externalizing behaviors are in moderate level, however the authorities should not taking it lightly and every people from grass roots level to higher up must be aware of this problems since these negative behavior are addictive and it eventually could lead to more serious problems later on. Besides that, adolescents also show a moderate level of self-concept and family relationships factors. In addition, this study provided some evidence regarding the sex differences of the externalizing behavior. Findings showed a consistent results with past study, which is the study found that, the boys were engaged with the externalizing behavior more than girls.

Next, current study also determine the relationship between self-concept, family relationship quality and externalizing behavior among adolescent aged between 13 to 18 years old. The finding showed the significant relationship between self-concept and externalizing among adolescents. Moreover, two out of three domain in family relationship that have been discussed (eg; family cohesion and family structure) were found to be associated with the externalizing behavior problems.

Thus, this study achieved the objectives in supporting the existing literature. The understanding about adolescent's self-concept was important in order to control the aggressive behavior among adolescents. Therefore, the educators might used this information as a guideline to organize programme that will build on adolescents self-concept as well as to improve school programmes for the problematic students. Also, this research highlight the important of family relationship quality for the development of adolescents behavior. Lastly, this study suggest that the future study to run the longitudinal research in order to examine the temporal nature of these relationships since the current research was a cross-sectional study and the definite information about cause-and-effect relationships could not be measure between the self-concept, family relationship quality and adolescences externalizing behaviors.

Ethical Approval

The ethical committee of University Putra Malaysia.

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